

Original: English

**DRAFT RECOMMENDATION BY ICCAT TO ESTABLISH A REBUILDING PROGRAM FOR BLUE MARLIN
AND WHITE MARLIN/ROUNDSCALE SPEARFISH STOCKS**

Proposal submitted by the European Union

RECALLING the 2000 *Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish a Plan to Rebuild Blue Marlin and White Marlin Populations* (Rec. 00-13) from ICCAT to rebuild Atlantic blue marlin and Atlantic white marlin;

FURTHER RECALLING that the *Recommendation by ICCAT to Further Strengthen the Plan to Rebuild Blue Marlin and White Marlin Stocks* (Rec. 12-04) established an annual landings limit for each of these stocks, along with other conservation and management measures designed to address all sources of fishing mortality, as a step toward the establishment of formal rebuilding programs for these stocks;

FURTHER RECALLING *Recommendation by ICCAT on Improvement of Compliance Review of Conservation and Management Measures Regarding Billfish Caught in the ICCAT Convention Area* (Rec. 18-05) establishing a check sheet detailing the implementation of compliance of CPCs with billfish conservation and management measures;

CONSIDERING that the 2018 SCRS stock assessment indicated that the blue marlin stock is below B_{MSY} (the stock is overfished) and that fishing mortality is above F_{MSY} (overfishing is occurring) and that only catch levels of 1,750 t or less would prevent further stock decline by eliminating overfishing immediately, with a greater than 50% probability and allow the stock to rebuild by 2028;

FURTHER CONSIDERING that the 2019 SCRS stock assessment indicated that the white marlin stock is below B_{MSY} (the stock is overfished) although overfishing is not occurring and that catches of white marlin shall not exceed 400 t until the stock has fully recovered;

RECOGNIZING that SCRS expressed concerns that the catches of blue and white marlin have generally exceeded the agreed TACs since 2012, preventing the stocks from rebuilding;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that SCRS expressed concern with the significant increase in the contribution from artisanal and small-scale fisheries to the total blue marlin catch, that landings from these fisheries are not fully accounted for in the ICCAT database, and that it is imperative to develop CPUE indices for all fleets that have substantial landings of blue marlin;

HIGHLIGHTING that the SCRS recommended releasing all marlins that are alive at haulback through methods that maximize their survival;

FURTHER HIGHLIGHTING that the SCRS indicated that circle hooks can reduce deep hooking and, therefore, increase the post-release survival of marlins in many fisheries and that the SCRS recommended that the Commission consider this approach;

FURTHER RECALLING the existing obligations of Contracting Parties, non-Contracting Parties, Entities and Fishing Entities (CPCs) to require the collection of discard data in their existing domestic observer and logbook programs under the *Recommendation by ICCAT on Information Collection and Harmonization of Data on By-catch and Discards in ICCAT Fisheries* (Rec. 11-10), and the minimum standards for scientific observer programs established in the *Recommendation by ICCAT to Establish Minimum Standards for Fishing Vessel Scientific Observer Programs* (Rec. 16-14);

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that SCRS recommended to increase the recording and reporting of live releases and dead discards by expanding the level of coverage by observer programs as well as through electronic monitoring systems;

COGNIZANT that marlins are caught in industrial, artisanal small-scale and recreational fisheries, and that fair and equitable conservation actions are needed to end overfishing and support rebuilding;

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
ATLANTIC TUNAS (ICCAT) RECOMMENDS THAT:

Annual limits

1. An annual limit of 1,750 t for blue marlin and 400 t for white marlin/roundscale spearfish is implemented for these stocks in 2020, 2021 and 2022. These landings limits are implemented as follows:

<i>Blue Marlin</i>	<i>Landings Limit (t)</i>
Brazil	164,6
China, P.R.	39,0
Chinese Taipei	130,0
Côte d'Ivoire	130,0
European Union	415,9
Ghana	216,6
Japan	337,9
Korea Rep.	30,3
Mexico	60,7
S. Tomé & Príncipe	39,0
Senegal	52,0
Trinidad and Tobago	17,3
Venezuela	86,6
TOTAL	1,720

<i>White Marlin/ Roundscale Spearfish</i>	<i>Landings Limit (t)</i>
Barbados	10
Brazil	50
Canada	10
China, P.R.	10
Chinese Taipei	50
European Union	50
Côte d'Ivoire	10
Japan	35
Korea Rep.	20
Mexico	25
S. Tome & Principe	20
Trinidad and Tobago	15
Venezuela	50
TOTAL	355

The United States shall limit its landings to 217 specimens of recreationally-caught Atlantic blue marlin and white marlin/roundscale spearfish combined on an annual basis. All other CPCs shall limit their landings to a maximum of 8,7 t of Atlantic blue marlin and 2 t of white marlin/roundscale spearfish combined.

2. Any excess of the annual landing limit established in paragraph 1 shall be deducted from, according to the case, the respective landing limit during or before the adjustment year, in the following way:

<i>Catch Year</i>	<i>Adjustment Year</i>
2020	2022
2021	2023
2022	2024

Live release

3. CPCs shall require vessels flying their flag to promptly release all blue marlin and white marlin/round scale spearfish that are alive at haul back in a manner that, to the extent possible, causes the least harm and that maximizes post-release survival, while giving due consideration to the safety of crew members.
4. CPCs shall ensure that the minimum standards for safe handling and live release procedures, as specified in **Annex 1**, are implemented while taking into consideration the safety of the crew; the fishing vessels shall have readily available on deck, where crew can get it quickly, lifting device, bolt cutter, dehooker/disgorger and line-cutter for safely release of live marlins caught.
5. CPCs shall ensure that captain and crew members of their fishing vessels are adequately trained, aware of and use proper mitigation, identification, handling and releasing techniques and keep on board all necessary equipment for the release of marlins in accordance with the minimum standards for safe handling procedures as specified in **Annex 1**. These minimum standards, however, do not replace possible stricter guidelines established by CPCs national Authorities.
6. Blue marlin and white marlin/round scale spearfish that are caught by vessels of LOA equal to or smaller than 12m flying the flag of a coastal CPC are exempted from paragraphs 3, 4 and 5, provided these CPCs (a) submit Task I and Task II data according to the reporting procedures established by the SCRS and (b) take necessary measures to ensure that blue marlin and white marlin/roundscale spearfish do not enter international trade and notify the Commission of such measures in their Annual Report.
7. CPCs shall work to minimize the post-release mortality of marlins/roundscale spearfish in their ICCAT fisheries.

Observer programs

8. In order to monitor the implementation of paragraph 3, all longline fishing vessels shall gradually increase their observer coverage to 10% by 2021 and to 20% by 2023 at latest, in accordance with *Recommendation by ICCAT to establish minimum standards for fishing vessel scientific observer programs* [Rec. 16-14]. This increase in the coverage can be supported either by means of human observers onboard vessels or by means of suitable electronic monitoring systems installed on their longline vessels. The monitoring should include recording and reporting accurate estimates of live releases and dead discards.

9. CPCs with recreational/sport fisheries shall gradually increase their scientific observer coverage to 10% by 2021 and to 20% by 2023 of blue marlin and white marlin/roundscale spearfish tournament landings.

Additional measures for recreational and sport fisheries

10. CPCs with recreational fisheries shall adopt domestic regulations that establish minimum sizes in their recreational fisheries that meet or exceed the following lengths: 251 cm LJFL for blue marlin and 168 cm LJFL for white marlin/roundscale spearfish, or comparable limits by weight.
11. CPCs shall prohibit the sale, or offering for sale, of any part or whole carcass of blue marlin or white marlin/roundscale spearfish caught in recreational fisheries.

Data collection, reporting and compliance

12. In their Annual Reports, CPCs shall inform the Commission of steps taken to implement the provisions of this Recommendation through domestic law or regulations, including monitoring, control and surveillance measures.
13. In addition to the Annual Reports, CPCs shall submit to the ICCAT Secretariat, details of their implementation of and compliance with billfish conservation and management measures using the check sheet in Annex 1 of *Recommendation by ICCAT on Improvement of Compliance Review of Conservation and Management Measures Regarding Billfish Caught in the ICCAT Convention Area* [Rec. 18-05].
14. CPCs with artisanal and small-scale fisheries shall provide information about their data collection programs in their Annual Reports, and the SCRS shall continue to review and evaluate this information as a basis for developing recommendations to improve or expand these programs, including through capacity building.
15. CPCs shall provide their estimates of live and dead discards, and all available data including observer data on landings and discards for blue marlin, white marlin/roundscale spearfish, annually by July 31 as part of their Task I and II data submission to support the stock assessment process.

SCRS work and request for scientific advice

16. The SCRS shall review the Task I and II data referred to in paragraph 15 above and determine the feasibility of estimating fishing mortalities by industrial fisheries (including longline and purse seine), artisanal fisheries and recreational fisheries. The SCRS shall also continue its work to further improved data collection initiatives as part of the ICCAT Enhanced Program for Billfish Research to overcome the data gap issues of those fisheries, in particular artisanal fisheries of developing CPCs, and shall recommend the initiative to the Commission for its approval in 2020.
17. The SCRS should develop estimates of billfish discard mortality, by implementing a collaborative study through observer data to analyse the effect of time, area, soak-time and gear configurations on discards variations.
18. In order to help the SCRS and CPCs in the design of data collections and sampling programs, the SCRS should develop an inventory of recreational/sport fishing activities through collaboration with organisations such as the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) and the Billfish Foundation, to establish a list of countries, and where possible, ports within the ICCAT Convention area, where sport-fishing activities are known to interact with billfish.

19. The Secretariat, with support from the Commission and the SCRS, shall continue its review of the relevant work conducted by the regional and sub-regional international organizations, similar to the review conducted for West Africa, with a priority focus on the Caribbean and Latin America. The Secretariat and CPCs are also encouraged to collaborate with the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) on fishery statistics on ICCAT species.
20. The SCRS is requested to advise by 2021 at latest on the implementation of minimum standards for the use of Electronic Monitoring System in longline fishing vessels for billfish as well as for tropical and temperate tuna fisheries.
21. Taking into account the findings of these regional reviews, the CPCs shall take action, as appropriate, to improve data collection and reporting programs in accordance with any SCRS advice in preparation for the next white marlin/roundscale spearfish and blue marlin stock assessments.
22. At its next assessments of blue marlin and white marlin/roundscale spearfish stocks, the SCRS shall evaluate progress toward the goals of the rebuilding programs for blue marlin and white marlin/roundscale spearfish.

Review of the measure and repeal

23. If the average annual total catch of any of the species referred to in paragraph 1 in any two consecutive years period from 2020 onward exceeds the limits referred to in paragraph 1, the Commission shall review the implementation and effectiveness of the measures contained in this Recommendation and consider the adoption of additional conservation and management measures, as appropriate.
24. This Recommendation repeals and replaces the *Recommendation by ICCAT to Replace Rec. 15-05 to Further Strengthen the Plan to Rebuild Blue Marlin and White Marlin Stocks* (Rec. 18-04).

Minimum standards for safe handling and live release procedures¹

The following steps should be followed to reduce stress and injury to incidentally caught marlins and roundscale spearfish specimens for a maximum probability of survival while minimizing the safety risk to the crew. Skippers and crew should always put their personal safety first when releasing marlins and other large fish. Wear gloves and avoid working around the spear-shaped bill. These basic guidelines do not replace stricter safety rules established by CPCs national Authorities.

- Stop the vessel or substantially reduce its speed.
- Secure the far side of the longline mainline to the boat to avoid that any remaining gear in the water pulls on the line and the animal.
- Bring the marlin as close to the vessel as possible without putting too much tension on the branchline to avoid that a released hook or branchline breaks could shoot hook, weights and other parts toward the vessels at high speed.
- Do not remove the alive marlin from the water boatside, while safely removing the hook.
- Limit the number of manipulation.
- Do not gaff the fish in the body.
- If possible, avoid grabbing the marlin by the body and if use gloves to grab the marlin by its snout or a snooter.
- In case the hook is visible, lightly flicking the branchline to try dislodging the hook.
- Where feasible rig a measuring device so the fish can be roughly measured in the water (e.g. mark a pole, leader and float; mark the gunwale of the boat with measurements marks).
- If the marlin is vigorously twisting and spinning making it too dangerous to use a dehooker/disgorger or the marlin swallowed the hook that cannot be seen, then use a long-handled line cutter and cut the leader/line as close to the fish as safely possible so that they are not trailing large amounts of line that could reduce post-release survival.
- Help revive the fish by slowly towing it in the water until its colour or energy returns (5 minutes or more). Most highly migratory species must keep water flowing over their gills to breathe. With the boat in gear, slowly move forward while keeping the fish's head in the water.
- If hooked, and hook is visible in the body or mouth, use a bolt cutter to remove the hook barb, and then remove the hook.
- Don't wrap your fingers, hands or arms in the line when bringing a marlin to the boat - you might get pulled overboard.
- Don't lift them using the branchline, especially if hooked.
- Do not lift using thin wires or cables or by the tail alone.

¹ <https://www.bmis-bycatch.org/index.php/mitigation-techniques/safe-handling-release>

- Poisson F., Wendling B., Cornella D., Segorb C., 2016. Guide du pêcheur responsable : Bonnes pratiques pour réduire la mortalité des espèces sensibles capturées accidentellement par les palangriers pélagiques français en Méditerranée. Projets SELPAL et RéPAST. 60 pages.
- Poisson F., Vernet A. L., Séret B., Dagorn L. Good practices to reduce the mortality of sharks and rays caught incidentally by the tropical tuna purse seiners. EU FP7 project #210496 MADE, Deliverable 7.2., 30p.
- AFMA (2016) Shark and Ray Handling Practices - A guide for commercial fishers in southern Australia.
- NOAA fisheries, 2017, Careful Catch and Release Brochure. 2 pages.